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ART BUCHWALD

In Moscow, the Embassy Laundry List

It isn't too much fun for an American diplomat to be stationed in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow these days. When the United States kicked out 55 Russians, the Soviets withdrew all their housekeeping personnel from the American Embassy in Moscow, leaving more than 400 American employees to scrub the floor.

To show you what pain this caused, here are reprints of some of the top-secret cables exchanged between the State Department and our brave people in Moscow.

TELEX TO:
U.S. EMBASSY, MOSCOW

Please advise exact status medium-range missiles, including number now on station as well as how many in reserve. Urgent you also let us know whether Soviets intend to increase conventional troops if treaty is agreed upon.—Harlequin
STATE DEPARTMENT,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Toilet on fourth floor leaking. Have made it off-limits to all those below the rank of consul. Urgently need to talk to department water-closet expert with particular know-how in rubber plungers. Don't send any more new embassy personnel until toilet is fixed. Everyone here would rather have half-baked plumber than first-class CIA station

chief.—Stick
U.S. EMBASSY, MOSCOW

President wants to know what was Politburo's reaction when Gorbachev returned from Iceland summit. Also, is hanging tough on Star Wars playing in Smolensk? Finally, how much grain will Soviets buy this year? Need information for GOP fund-raising speech tonight.—Harlequin

STATE DEPARTMENT,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Sending this in code so someone in Washington will read it. Lower oven in the kitchen has funny smell. Experiencing severe frying pan shortage. Those who can't stand the heat are getting out of kitchen. Please advise Secretary Shultz that wives of American employees refuse to polish silver unless husbands do windows. Am unable to supply information the president requested because today is field day and the ambassador is going to inspect our rooms.—Stick

U.S. EMBASSY, MOSCOW

We are not, repeat not, interested in your problems. We just received word here that Marshal Blini, commander of all Soviet air forces, wants to defect and live in United States. Make immediate contact and give him asylum in embassy so we can wring him dry.—Harlequin

STATE DEPARTMENT,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

All hands Moscow agree this not a good time to give Marshal Blini asylum as we are short on sheets and pillowcases. Staff resistance to doubling up with a defector is growing. Suggest he stay on Soviet General Staff until housekeeping crisis is over. By the way, snack bar pizza machine broke down. Can we set up conference call with pizza engineer in United States to repair it? Morale still high since you sent chicken cacciatore in diplomatic pouch.—Stick

U.S. EMBASSY, MOSCOW

We are notified through Kremlin hot line that giant Soviet missile misfired and is now heading toward Malta. Find out exact position of missile and where it is expected to land. Also is it nuclear-armed? This is a priority message.—Harlequin
STATE DEPARTMENT,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Good news. Just found out what was wrong with pizza machine. There was a broken bolt at the bottom you can't see unless someone crawls underneath it. Am trying to get over to the Foreign Office to check out missile query. Can't leave embassy until repairman from Helsinki arrives to look at our washing machine. You know how hard it is to get one of those guys.—Stick

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